

Out Breath by Nyah

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Summary:

Adventures of the Liar and the Doubter at the end of the world and before the lights went out.

Out Breath

A few steps inside the flimsy excuse for a door, he stops kissing her with the equal and opposite force he'd used to pull her into that kiss in the first place. His back is up against the wall and she's standing off balance, alone, in the middle of the room, sense of touch still a few seconds behind. She can feel everywhere his hands were on her a moment ago like her skin had bunched up as easily as the fabric of her shirt and was coming unwrinkled slowly, snapping with the static of frustration.

"What the hell?" She says indignantly, heart so loud she thinks for a second Murray is knocking on the door and she whips around to look at it with rage. She only just registers the new steel in her voice, the certainty, grown over a year of horrors that didn't beat her, that she wants him and she's earned this. "What the hell, Jonathan?" She says, louder still, angry before he has a chance to answer at the fact that he's not a coward in anything but this.

Jonathan breathes fast and deep. His eyes cast around wildly like he's chalking and erasing numbers in the air, doing the math of self control. Each breath out is a propulsive force, anchoring his resolve to the wall at his back. His shoulders don't fall in on themselves. He's not afraid anymore. Not of her, not of the way she looks at him and what she must see.

"Steve," he says like the name means regret. "I don't hate the guy enough to....I know how I'd feel if I had someone like you and lost her just because...because the world was ending."

She too tries to catch her breath, feeling her own eyes dart around the dim, low room in panic. No, no. Anger. "That's really patronizing, you know. I don't get to make choices for myself now because of Steve?"

"No," he says and his shoulders really are the straightest she's ever seen them, like he's holding up the wall and the world and he's never been afraid to kiss her he's just saying no. "You can do whatever you want but I get to make choices too, Nancy. If I get to be with you, I don't want it to be because we snuck off to hide in some nowhere place."

“It’s not like that.”

“Oh, come on. It’s exactly like that. It’s so much like that that everyone on this mission to Bizarro-Ville has been telling us so for the last two days. It’s like our lives are this insane play with monsters and mysterious labs and we just walked off stage left where nothing counts toward the plot.” He’d been looking her dead in the eye but now he looks away for the first time and she finds herself wondering, against reason, if he’d kissed her with his eyes open, taking it all in because he never meant to do it again.

“You’re right, Nancy. We’re only friends when there’s a monster to fight and it’s great...it’s great being your friend. But this is going to fuck up our regular lives, the ones we’re trying to get back. Yours with Steve and mine with...well, with any other girl for a really long time because I’ll compare them all to you. Maybe forever. Pick Steve, Nancy. Even if you just like him. Because the world won’t be ending forever, not if we do this right.”

She runs a hand through her hair angrily and clenches her jaw so hard something creaks. She thinks about shouting at him, screaming about how he’s passing up his one chance and that this will be the pattern of his pretentious, self-righteous, lonely existence if he doesn’t get his head out of his ass. But that would make the third lie of the night.

She lets the tension drain from her face, feels the anger and vindication go with a sting of loss. Life was chaos and it felt good to explode but he’s standing across from her in a spare room in the middle of nowhere and he has trust issues and straight shoulders and a kind heart her misplaced rage could shred to pieces like a blow from a baseball bat studded with nails.

“I don’t pick Steve,” she says. “It’s okay if you don’t believe me right now because I won’t pick Steve tomorrow or the day after or the day after we save the world again. You got it?”

He meets her eyes steadily, not trying to hide a small smile until a passing car’s headlights force him to blink and squint. “So...when we’re not busy blackmailing a murderous government agency, you’re planning to woo me.”

“Woo.” She can't stop a giggle of absurdity at the whole thing. But then she takes a steadying breath. “I like you. Everyone has known that for a year but me and everyone has believed it for a year but you. Lies and trust issues, right?”

His shoulders sag for the first time. “I appreciate the continuity,” he says like he's analyzing a novel, a sure sign he's going to shut down, redirect, “but it's not as simple as, 'you think you like me so everything is fine now'.”

“Jonathan,” she says and it sounds like “Idiot”. “I think I love you but I need time to be sure that's true and so do you and that's fine but only if you'll let me have it. So will you? Please?”

He tugs at his shirt where it's rucked up halfway to his ribs on one side, smoothing the thin cotton. His eyebrows knit and purl, like he's trying on reactions, trying out the consequences of his next words. He puffs a cheek out with a resigned shy, nodding quick, sharp nods at the ground and swallowing compulsively. “Okay,” he says finally, so simply she has to fight back the adrenaline of the moment to make sure he's answering the question she thinks he is.

“...Okay?” She's smiling and shaking her head in confusion. “Okay...go away and never speak of this again? Or okay, okay and I can have the rest of my kiss now, please.”

He grins and nods and breathes in.

Author's Note:

Disclaimer: Standard non-ownership.

A one-shot at this point. Holla if you're hella interested in more though.